"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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AGRICULTURE AS A WAY OF LIFE**

The Point of View of a Farm Woman

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My home is the farm my father was born on and lived all of his eighty-one years. He had a full, happy and interesting life. His love of the land and his knowledge of all that grew from and upon it were the basis of his philosophy. Second only to that were his interest in mechanics and his ability to utilize water-power into labor-saving activities for his farm.

As a homemaker, I am surrounded by the things chosen and used by my grandmother, my mother, my generation, and the next. One of my theories is that we should hold on to the best of the past and be ready to advance with the present and the future. I hope you will pardon me for introducing my subject with this personal point of view, but perhaps I can make my points clearer by this method than by any other.

Agriculture as a way of life seems to mean many different things to different people. Within the span of my memory, many different attitudes have been in vogue in regard to life on farms and, in particular, the life of a farm woman. As a matter of fact, life on farms differs as widely as, for instance, life in a pent-house differs from that in a slum tenement in the city. In the city, the major extent of life depends upon the earning ability of the breadwinner, while on the farm, this depends a great deal upon the ideals, thrift and skill of the homemaker. I would not like you to think that I do not consider money necessary for well-being in the country. It is increasingly important with each generation and right now the tragedy of decaying farm buildings and equipment due to small farm means and an almost entire lack of extra farm labor is serious.

Some people emphasize the God-given advantages of living in the country and feel that all farmers should be satisfied with these alone. Many farmers have had to be satisfied with these blessings for some time and they have carried on largely due to the fact that those who have gone before had builded well. The true farmer always appreciates the natural forces and finds contentment in his home and peace in his community if given half a chance. We grow to love and revere the earth and the rain and the sun, and we have pleasure and a sense of obligation in the part which we can play in making the land produce.

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I am at a loss to know how to express the farmer's attitude clearly. I can do no better perhaps than quote from that great teacher and poet of country life, L. H. Bailey: "The outlook to nature is, of course, the outlook to optimism, for nature is our governing condition and is beyond the power of man to modify or to correct. We look upward and outward to nature."

Farm life has been described as dull and humdrum. To me, life on farms is dramatic for everyone. The process of growth and harvesting is always a contest with the elements, and one hour of storm, unseasonable frost, wind or flood may destroy all profits. It is only as we harness and assist these forces that we appreciate their strength for production as well as destruction. The well-being of cattle and all livestock also is a constant, all-absorbing interest. Any occupant of a farm must be dull indeed not to feel and take part in these dramatic events. The stoicism with which the farmer and his family meet the frequent tragedies in these dramas is almost universal.

I was much impressed with that fact a few years ago when all of our section of the state was stricken with a sudden flood. The householders in the villages were most articulate and complaining about the disaster and their losses, while the farmers, whose losses were many times greater than those of the villages, made little complaint.

I grew up having all the opportunities for adventure which life on the farm afforded. Woods with their mysterious and sweet, cool smells; flashes of unknown birds, and the exciting moments when foxes or ruffled grouse startled me when picking berries or on other excursions. Then when driving horses on hay rakes, while I was learning skill and judgments, I was caught into the excitements of harvesting. It filled needs for adventure, now largely only sought in thrilling pictures. Stones were always material for constructing play houses, and trees to climb became castles in the air, in fact. That there could be a point of view that did not appreciate these joys did not occur to me until, when I was an adult, a city guest, when being questioned about her impressions of the country, remarked that she loved it for a vacation and thought she might even like to live in the country, but that she had always felt so sorry for the children in the country because she had had such a wonderful time with the children on the block when she was a child. It is my theory that we don't need to feel sorry for children anywhere if they have a loving home, health, and are well-fed, and I still maintain that life on the farm can be, and usually is, a delightful one for children.

Farm women have frequently been depicted as down-trodden, overworked, crushed individuals. Some of us have capitalized upon this in our paralyzing desire for sympathy. That, fortunately, is not the attitude of the average farm woman. The average farm woman as I know her is a self-respecting individual who loves her home and is proud to take part in the production of the farm as a matter of course when her household tasks and her strength allow it. She keeps fit by so doing as probably no other American woman does, with the possible exception of a city woman who can afford to continue horseback-riding and other exercises, equally healthful, into her mature life.

When a farm woman feels compelled to curtail her part in production or to neglect her household tasks when she is physically unfit, it is indeed a tragedy as it is any place, but it is often a double tragedy on a farm for it sometimes spells failure.

Women love to grow things, and cheerful flowering plants are an almost universal hobby for farm women. In fact, women seem to be natural horticulturists and the vegetable gardens are largely their responsibility on the farms. One cannot but be impressed when driving through the country or entering its homes at the evidence of loving care that flowers receive, both inside the homes in winter and outside in summer here in the North--and that is as true in our impoverished-appearing homes as well as the well-kept ones. I doubt if there is anything that tends to soften the discouragements and bring joy to the spirits of the women to a greater extent than growing blooming plants.

When I was a young girl, I remember feeling that if we could have a good road to our farm and a telephone, I would never want to live any other place. Youth always craves freedom and without these opportunities of contact, I did not feel free. My sympathy is very much with those people still living on farms only reached by the poorest dirt roads. The radio has become a much more important part of farm living than the telephone. The joy radio can and does bring into farm living is inestimable. I used to hunger for good music. Today I time an hour of ironing I have to do with an hour of very splendid symphony music. My neighbor might find her satisfaction in a cowboy program or perhaps in a dramatic sketch.

Radio offers splendid educational programs, news of the day, and programs especially adapted to farm interests. The greatest need is for someone to dramatize true farm life and people with the skill and understanding of human values that Mrs. Berg uses in depicting the city home life of the Goldbergs, and their excursions into the country, and to give, as is sometimes given on the Goldberg's program, the dignity and reverence to the Christian religion that Mrs. Berg gives to the Jewish faith even in every-day living.

All too often the novelist deals with the sordid in farm life. I took a walk around a pasture field to inspect a fence one spring. There were brambles encountered as well as all the spring joys of budding leaf and flower, a carcass of a raccoon caught in a dead-fall and the trap never visited, and also, joy of joys, a partridge nest with ten eggs in it, and finally over the fence on a neighbor's land, a pile of carrion and refuse better left undescribed. If I had been a writer of fiction my chief theme might have been the neglected trap and the carrion pile, while the most lasting impression to me was the attempt of the mother partridge to entice me away from her precious home.

Farm women have always taken great pride in their housekeeping, in being good cooks and have been inclined to glorify hard work, and to be somewhat ashamed of doing things just for pleasure. To sympathize with the difficulty of the labor detracts from the dignity. There is a tendency for these points of view to be softened fortunately and where possible to use modern conveniences to assist with drudgery and more and more to develop a realiza-

tion that community contacts for pleasure are not disgraceful. Being satisfied with the old-fashioned methods of grandmother and mother was and still is, shall we say, a vice with some of our homemakers. This is not so with all women and many of them have been clamoring for more education in their life task of homemaking. They are intelligently learning to use new skills and to adapt old skills more efficiently to the ever-changing pattern of living.

The normal farm family life is a happy life. Husband and wife are business partners from the beginning and the details of successes and failures are known equally by both. The affairs of the farm naturally make up a large part of conversation and, as a rule, farm children see and know more of their father and his work than is true in most other occupations, at least.

It is not at all unusual to see very small children following their father in the fields or riding with him at his work with horses. I think there may be something in his life that makes him more patient than most other men. Farmers have been severely criticized for their opposition to the child labor amendment and accused of exploiting their children. They naturally resent this, for it is their firm conviction that learning to share in the easy tasks and greater responsibilities is good training of character as well as skills.

There is a technique in handling tools and animals as surely as in playing a musical instrument, which is best acquired while young.

I have been asked if I believe that farmers are more or less religious than other people. Does any human know who are most religious? The farmer is so close to the re-creation of life and has proof that winter is not the end, so it is natural to believe that he is reverent even if inarticulate as to his beliefs. If he is not a regular attendant at church, at least it is not because he is self-indulgent.

We who love the land and its people hate to acknowledge that there are degraded homes on the land. It has been said that rural institutions are not so well equipped to care for the slum type of family as the institutions of the city. If this is true, it is a challenge to all and no one can afford to be complacent about it. Degraded homes do exist, dotted about in the northern states, and if we are to believe the spokesman of the southern sharecroppers, degradation predominates.

I should like to visualize in the future, an agriculture which would finance a nation of farm homes like the best of these we know today where all members of the family take part in production and play, where there is a spiritual understanding of God's blessing, and the ability to make the best use of man's inventions for the comfort and convenience of the family and the community.

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